

The Vision of the Cross

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contemporary statements of Eusebius, Lactantius, and Nazarius. And of these by far the fullest and most important is that of Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, who explicitly declares that he is repeating the story as it was told to him by Constantine himself.

Eusebius shews us the Emperor of Gaul anxiously abating within his own mind whether his forces were equal to the dangerous enterprise upon which he had embarked. Maxentius had a formidable army. He had also laboured to bring over to his side the powers of heaven and hell. Constantine's information from Rome apprised him that Maxentius was assiduously employing all the black arts of magic and wizardry to gain the favour of the gods. And Constantine grew uneasy and apprehensive, for no one then disbelieved in the efficacy of magic, and he considered whether he might not counterbalance this undue advantage which Maxentius was obtaining by securing the protecting services of some equally potent deity. Such is the only possible meaning of Eusebius's words, *ἡ δὲ φωνὴ ἐκείνη εἶπε· ὁ δὲ θεὸς ὁ οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν ἐκτίσας*—words which seem strange in the twentieth century, but were natural enough in the fourth. "He thought in his own mind what sort of god he ought to secure as ally" and then, says his biographer, the idea occurred to him that though his predecessors in the purple had believed in a multiplicity of gods, the great majority of them had perished miserably. The gods, at whose altars they had offered rich sacrifice and libations, had deserted them in their hour